

## 4. THE LAW OF INVERSION

Every type of passion (sexual pleasure, fits of rage, hate and loathing) which is normally considered taboo by Buddhist ethical standards, is activated and nurtured in *Vajrayana* with the goal of then transforming it into its opposite. The Buddhist monks, who are usually subject to a strict, puritanical-seeming set of rules, cultivate such “breaches of taboo” without restriction, once they have decided to follow the “Diamond Path”. Excesses and extravagances now count as part of their chosen lifestyle. Such acts are not simply permitted, but are prescribed outright, because according to tantric doctrine, evil can only be driven out by evil, greed by greed alone, and poison is the only cure for poison.

Suitably radical instructions can be found in the *Hevajra Tantra*: “A wise man ... should remove the filth of his mind by filth ... one must rise by that through which one falls”, or, more vividly, “As flatulence is cured by eating beans so that wind may expel wind, as a thorn in the foot can be removed by another thorn, and as a poison can be neutralized by poison, so sin can purge sin” (Walker, 1982, p. 34). For the same reason, the *Kalachakra Tantra* exhorts its pupils to commit the following: to kill, to lie, to steal, to break the marriage vows, to drink alcohol, to have sexual relations with lower-class girls (Broido, 1988, p. 71). A Tantric is freed from the chains of the wheel of life by precisely that which imprisons a normal person.

As a tantric saying puts it, “What binds the fool, liberates the wise” (Dasgupta, 1974, p. 187), and another, more drastic passage emphasizes that, “the same deed for which a normal mortal would burn for a hundred million eons, through this same act an initiated yogi attains enlightenment” (Eliade, 1985, p. 272). According to this, every ritual is designed to catapult the initiand into a state beyond good and evil.

This spiritual necessity to encounter the forbidden, has essentially been justified via five arguments:

Firstly, through breaking a taboo for which there is often a high penalty, the adept confirms the core of the entire Buddhist philosophy: the emptiness (*shunyata*) of all appearances. “I am void, the world is void, all three worlds are void”, the *Maha Siddha* Tilopa triumphantly proclaims — therefore “neither sin nor virtue” exist (Dasgupta, 1974, p. 186). The *shunyata* principle thus provides a metaphysical legitimization for any conceivable “crime”, as it actually lacks any inherent existence.

A second argument follows from the emptiness, the “equivalence of all being”. Neither purity nor impurity, neither lust nor loathing, neither beauty nor ugliness exist. There is thus “no difference between food and offal, between fruit juice and blood, between vegetable sap and urine, between syrup and semen” (Walker, 1982, p.32). A fearless *maha siddha* justifies a serious misdeed of which he has been accused with the words: A fearless *maha siddha* justifies a serious misdeed of which he has been accused with the words: “Although medicine and poison create contrary effects, in their ultimate essence they are one; likewise negative qualities and aids on the path, one in essence, should not be differentiated” (quoted by Stevens, 1990, p. 69). Thus the yogi could with a clear conscience wander along ways on the far side of the dominant moral codex. “By the same evil acts that bring people into hell the one who uses the right means gains salvation, there is no doubt. All evil and virtue are said to have thought as their basis” (Snellgrove, 1987, vol. 1, p. 174).

The third — somewhat ad hoc, but nonetheless frequent — justification for the “transgressions” of the *Vajrayana* consists in the Bodhisattva vow of *Mahayana* Buddhism, which requires that one aid and assist every creature until it attains enlightenment. Amazingly, this pious purpose can render holy the most evil means. “If”, we can read in one of the tantras, “for the good of all living beings or on account of the Buddha’s teaching one should slay living beings, one is untouched by sin. ... If for the good of living beings or from attachment for the Buddha’s interest, one seizes the wealth of others, one is not touched by sin”, and so forth (Snellgrove, 1987, vol. 1, p. 176). In the course of Tibetan history the Bodhisattva vow has, as we shall show in the second part of our study, legitimated numerous political and family-based murders, whereby the additional “clever” argument was also employed, that one had “freed” the murder victim from the world of appearances (*samsara*) and that he or she thus owed a debt of thanks to the murderer.

The fourth argument, which was also widespread in other magical cultures, is familiar to us from homeopathy, and states: *similia similibus curantur* (‘like cures like’). In this healing practice one usually works with tiny quantities, major sins can thus be expiated by more minor transgressions.

The fifth and final argument attempts to persuade us that enlightenment *per se* arises through the radical inversion of its opposite and that there is absolutely no other possible way to break free of the chains of *samsara*. Here, the tantric logic of inversion has become a dogma which no longer tolerates other paths to enlightenment. In this light, we can read in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* that “the most lowly-born, flute-makers and so forth, such [people] who constantly have murder alone in mind, attain perfection via this highest way” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 128). Yes, in some texts an outright proportionality exists between the magnitude of the “crime” and the speed with which the spiritual “liberation” occurs.

However, this tantric logic of inversion contains a dangerous paradox. On the one hand, *Vajrayana* stands not just in radical opposition to “social” norms, but likewise also to the original fundamental rules of its own Buddhist system. Thus, it must constantly fear accusations and persecution from its religious brethren. On the other there is the danger mentioned by Friedrich

Nietzsche, that anyone who too often looks monsters in the face can themselves become a monster. Sadly, history — especially that of Tibet — teaches us how many tantra masters were not able to rid themselves of the demons that they summoned. We shall trace this fate in the second part of our study.

### The twilight language

In order to keep hidden from the public all the offensive things which are implicated by the required breaches of taboo, some tantra texts make use of a so-called “twilight language” (*samdhya-bhasa*). This has the function of veiling references to taboo substances, private bodily parts, and illegal deeds in poetic words, so that they cannot be recognized by the uninitiated. For example, one says “lotus” and means “vagina”, or employs the term “enlightenment consciousness” (*bodhicitta*) for sperm, or the word “sun” (*surya*) for menstrual blood. Such a list of synonyms can be extended indefinitely.

It would, however, be hasty to presume that the potential of the tantric twilight language is exhausted by the employment of euphemistic expressions for sexual events in order to avoid stirring up offense in the world at large. In keeping with the magical world view of Tantrism, an equivalence or interdependence is often posited between the chosen “poetic” denotation and its counterpart in “reality”. Thus, as we shall later see, the male seed does indeed effect enlightenment consciousness (*bodhicitta*) when it is ritually consumed, and the vagina does in fact transform itself through meditative imagination into a lotus.

Of course, in such a metaphoric twilight everything is possible! Since, in contrast to the extensive commentaries, the taboo violations are often explicitly and unashamedly discussed in the original tantric texts, modern textual exegetes have often turned the tables. For example, in the unsavory horror scenes which are recounted here, the German lama Govinda sees warning signs which act as a deterrent to impudent intruders into the mysteries. To prevent unauthorized persons entering paradise, it is depicted as a slaughterhouse. But this imputed circumscription of the beautiful with the horrible contradicts the sense of the tantras, the intention of which is precisely to be sought in the transformation of the base into the sublime and thus the deliberate confrontation with the abominations of this world.

The scenarios which are presented in the following pages are indeed so abnormal that the hair of the early Western scholars stood on end when they first translated the tantric texts from Tibetan or Sanskrit. E. Burnouf was dismayed: “One hesitates to reproduce such hateful and humiliating teachings”, he wrote in the year 1844 (von Glasenapp, 1940, p. 167). Almost a century later, even world famous Tibetologists like Giuseppe Tucci or David Snellgrove admitted that they had simply omitted certain passages from their translated versions because of the horrors described therein, even though they thus abrogated their scholarly responsibilities (Walker, 1982, p. 121). Today, in the age of unlimited information, any resistance to the display of formerly taboo pictures is rapidly

evaporating. Thus, in some modern translation one is openly confronted with all the “crimes and sexual deviations” in the tantras.

## Sexual desire

Let us begin anew with the topic of sex. This is the axis around which all of Tantrism revolves. We have already spoken at length about why women were regarded as the greatest obstacle along the masculine path to enlightenment. Because the woman represents the feared gateway to rebirth, because she produces the world of illusion, because she steals the forces of the man — the origins of evil lie within her. Accordingly, to touch a woman was also the most serious breach of taboo for a Buddhist from the pre-tantric phase. The severity of the transgression was multiplied if it came to sexual intercourse.

But precisely because most extreme estrangement from enlightenment is inherent to the “daughters of *Mara*”, because they are considered the greatest obstacle for a man and barricade the realm of freedom, according to the tantric “law of inversion” they are for any adept the most important touchstone on the initiation path. He who understands how to gain mastery over women also understands how to control all of creation, as it is represented by him. On account of this paradox, sexual union enjoys absolute priority in *Vajrayana*. All other ritual acts, no matter how bizarre they may appear, are derived from this sexual magic origin.

Actually, the same tantric postulate — that the overcoming of an opposite pole should be considered more valuable and meritorious the more abnormal characteristics it exhibits — must also be valid for sexuality. According to the “law of inversion”, the more gloomy, repulsive, aggressive and perverse a woman is, the more suitable she must be to serve as a sexual partner in the rituals. But the preference of the yogis for especially young and attractive girls (which we mention above) seems to contradict this postulated ugliness.

Incidentally, the *Kalachakra Tantra* is itself aware of this contradiction, but is unable to resolve it. Thus the third book of the Time Tantra has the following suggestions to make: “Terrible women, furious, stuck-up, money-hungry, quarrelsome...are to be avoided” (Grünwedel, *Kalachakra III*, p. 121). But then, a few pages later, we find precisely the opposite: “A woman, who has abandoned herself to a lust for life, who takes delight in human blood ... is to be revered by the yogi” (Grünwedel, *Kalachakra III*, p. 146). The fourth book deals with the “law of inversion” directly, and in verse 207 describes the *karma mudra* as a “gnarled hetaera”. Directly after this follows the argument as to why a goddess must be hiding behind the face of the hetaera, since for the yogi, “gold [can] be worth the same as copper, a jewel from the crown of a god the same as a sliver of glass, if unheard of masculine force can be received through the loving donations of trained hetaeras ...” (Grünwedel, *Kalachakra IV*, p. 209) — that is, the highest masculine can be won from the basest feminine.

In this light, the *Chakrasamvara Tantra* recommends erotic praxis with haughty, moody, proud, dominant, wild, and untamable women, and the yogini *Laksminkara* urges the reader to revere a woman who is “mutilated and misshapen” (Gäng, 1988, p. 59). The *Maha Siddha* Tilopa also adhered strictly to the tantric politics of inversion and copulated with a woman, who bore the “eighteen marks of ugliness”, whatever they may be. His pupil Naropa followed in his footsteps and was initiated by an “ugly leprous old crone”. The later’s successor, Marpa, received his initiation at the hands of a “foul-smelling ‘funeral-place dakini’ ... with long emaciated breasts and huge sex organs of offensive odor” (Walker, 1982, p. 75).

Whilst the ugly “love partners” threaten at the outset the way to salvation and the life of an adept, at the end of the tantric process of inversion they shine like fairy-tale beauties, who have been transformed from toads into princesses. Thus, after the transmutation, a “jackal jaws” has become the “dakini of wisdom”; a “lion’s gob” the honourable “Buddha dakini” with “a bluish complexion and a radiant smile”; a “beak-face” a “jewel dakini” with an “pretty, white face” and so forth (Stevens, 1990, p. 97). All these charming creatures are under the complete control of their guru, who through the conquest of the demonic woman has attained the qualification of sorcerer and now calls the tune for the transformed demonesses.

For readily understandable reasons the fact remains that in the sexual magic practices a preference is shown for working with young and attractive girls. But even for this a paradoxical explanation is offered: Due to their attractiveness the virgins are far more dangerous for the yogi than an old hag. The chances that he lose his emotional and sexual self-control in such a relationship are thus many times higher. This means that attractive women present him with a even greater challenge than do the ugly.

The tantras are more consistent when applying the “law of inversion” to the social class of the female partners than they are with regard to age and beauty. Women from lower castes are not just recommendable, but rather appear to be downright necessary for the performance of certain rituals. The *Kalachakra Tantra* lists female gardeners, butchers, potters, whores, and needle-workers among its recommendations (Grünwedel, *Kalachakra III*, pp. 130, 131). In other texts there is talk of female pig-herds, actresses, dancers, singers, washerwomen, barmaids, weavers and similar. “Courtesans are also favored”, writes the Tibet researcher Matthias Hermanns, “since the more lecherous, depraved, dirty, morally repugnant and dissolute they are, the better suited they are to their role” (Hermanns, 1975, p. 191). This appraisal is in accord with the call of the Tantric Anangavajra to accept any *mudra*, whatever nature she may have, since “everything having its existence in the ultimate non-dual substance, nothing can be harmful for yoga; and therefore the yogin should enjoy everything to his heart’s content without the least fear or hesitation” (Dasgupta, 1974, p. 184).

Time and again, so-called *candalis* are mentioned as the Tantric’s sexual partners. These are girls from the lowest caste, who eke out a meager living with all manner of work around the crematoria. It is evident from a commentary upon the *Hevajra Tantra* that among other things they

there offered themselves to the vagrant yogis for the latter's sexual practices (Snellgrove, 1987, vol. 1, p. 168). For an orthodox Hindu such creatures were considered untouchable. If even the shadow of a *candali* fell upon a Hindu, the disastrous consequences were life-long for the latter.

Since it annulled the strict prescriptions of the Hindu caste system with its rituals, a fundamentally social revolutionary attitude has been ascribed to Tantric Buddhism. In particular, modern feminists accredit it with this (Shaw, 1994, p. 62). But, aside from the obvious fact that women from the lower classes are more readily available as sexual partners, here too the "law of inversion" is considered decisive for the choice to be made. The social inferiority of the woman increases the "antinomism" of the tantric rituals. "It is the symbol of the 'washerwoman' and the 'courtesan' [which are] of decisive significance", we may read in a book by Mircea Eliade, "and we must familiarize ourselves with the fact that, in accordance with the tantric doctrine of the identity of opposites, the 'most noble and valuable' is precisely [to be found] hidden within the 'basest and most banal'" (Eliade, 1985, p. 261, note 204).

Likewise, when women from the higher castes (Brahmans, 'warriors', or rich business people) are on the Tantric's wish list, especially when they are married, the law of inversion functions here as well, since a rigid taboo is broken through the employment of a wife from the upper classes — an indicator for the boundless power of the yogi.

### **The incest taboo**

There is indisputable evidence from archaic societies for the violation of the incest prohibition: there is hardly a tantra of the higher class in which sexual intercourse with one's own mother or daughter, with aunts or sisters-in-law is not encouraged. Here too the German lama Govinda emphatically protests against taking the texts literally. It would be downright ridiculous to think "that Tantric Buddhists really did encourage incest and sexual deviations (Govinda, 1991, p. 113). Mother, sister, daughter and so on stood for the four elements, egomania, or something similar.

But such symbolic assignments do not necessarily contradict the possibility of an incestuous praxis, which is in fact found not just in the Tibet of old, but also in totally independent cultures scattered all around the world. Here too, it remains valid that the yogi, who is as a matter of principle interested in a fundamental violation of proscriptions, must really long for an incestuous relationship. There is also no lack of historical reports. We present the curse of a puritanically minded lama from the 16th century, who addressed the excesses of his libertine colleagues as follows: "In executing the rites of sexual union the people copulate without regard to blood relations ... You are more impure than dogs and pigs. As you have offered the pure gods feces, urine, sperm and blood, you will be reborn in the swamp of rotten cadavers" (Paz, 1984, p.95).

## Eating and drinking impure substances

A central role in the rites is played by the tantric meal. It is absolutely forbidden for Buddhist monks to eat meat or drink alcohol. This taboo is also deliberately broken by *Vajrayana* adepts. To make the transgression more radical, the consumption of types of meat which are generally considered “forbidden” in Indian society is desired: elephant meat, horsemeat, dogflesh, beef, and human flesh. The latter goes under the name of *maha mamsa*, the ‘great flesh’. It usually came from the dead, and is a “meat of those who died due to their own karma, who were killed in battle due to evil karma or due to their own fault”, Pundarika writes in his traditional *Kalachakra* commentary, and goes on to add that it is sensible to consume this substance in pill form (Newman, 1987, p. 266). Small amounts of tit are also recommended in a modern text on the *Kalachakra Tantra* as well (Dhargyey, 1985, p. 25). There are recipes which distinguish between the various body parts and demand the consumption of brain, liver, lungs, intestines, testes and so forth for particular ceremonies.

The five taboo types of meat are granted a sacramental character. Within them are concentrated the energies of the highest Buddhas, who are able to appear through the “law of inversion”. The texts thus speak of the “five ambrosias” or “five nectars”. Other impure “foods” have also been assigned to the five Dhyani Buddhas. *Ratnasambhava* is associated with blood, *Amitabha* with semen, *Amoghasiddhi* with human flesh, *Aksobhya* with urine, *Vairocana* with excrement (Wayman, 1973, p. 116).

The *Candamaharosana Tantra* lists with relish the particular substances which are offered to the adept by his wisdom consort during the sexual magic rituals and which he must swallow: excrement, urine, saliva, leftovers from between her teeth, lipstick, dish-water, vomit, the wash water which remains after her anus has been cleaned (George, 1974, pp. 73, 78, 79) Those who “make the excrement and urine their food, will be truly happy”, promises the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 134). In the *Hevajra Tantra* the adept must drink the menstrual blood of his *mudra* out of a skull bowl (Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 98). But rotten fish, sewer water, canine feces, corpse fat, the excrement of the dead, sanitary napkins as well as all conceivable “intoxicating drinks” are also consumed (Walker, 1982, pp. 80–84).

There exists a strict commandment that the practicing yogi may not feel any disgust in consuming these impure substances. “One should never feel disgusted by excrement, urine, semen or blood” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 266). Fundamentally, “he must eat and drink whatever he obtains and he should not hold any notions regarding likes and dislikes” (Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 67).

But it is not just in the tantric rites, in Tibetan medicine as well all manner of human and animal excretions are employed for healing purposes. The excrement and urine of higher lamas are sought-after medicines. Processed into pills and offered for sale, they once played -and now play once more — a significant role in the business activities of Tibetan and exile-Tibetan monasteries. Naturally, the highest prices are paid for the excretions of the supreme hierarch, the Dalai Lama.



There is a report on the young Fourteenth god-king's sojourn in Beijing (in 1954) which recounts how His Holiness's excrement was collected daily in a golden pot in order to then be sent to Lhasa and processed into a medication there (Grunfeld, 1996, p. 22). Even if this source came from the Chinese camp, it can be given credence without further ado, since corresponding practices were common throughout the entire country.

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### The "feast on fæces fallacy"

As damtsig has come into contact with Western psychological materialism, self-defence tactics have taken a variety of forms. The one that has most intrigued me is what I have dubbed the "feast on fæces fallacy" - of which there appear to be two variations. I encountered the first during my introduction to Vajrayana at Vajradhatu Seminary - a three-month practice and study retreat designed by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. I attended this retreat after Trungpa Rinpoche's death, when his son, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, taught it. As the summer progressed and the teachings grew more challenging, speculation about samaya heated up. The speculation took on an odd repeating pattern. At some point in every conversation on the topic, someone would inevitably say, "I heard that samaya means that if the Sakyong tells you to eat shit, you have to do it." The conversation would then devolve into everyone deciding whether they would eat shit or not. After puzzling over it for a while, my eventual response to this statement was, "How likely is it that the Sakyong would ask you to eat shit?" The whole discussion was a scare tactic, however unconscious it may have been. It presented one with an extreme, *reductio ad absurdum* proposition from which one could quite justifiably turn away in disgust. In the process, it just so happened that one also cut oneself off from finding out what samaya actually *did* mean. That version of the Feast on Fæces Fallacy operates by the student scaring himself or herself away from damtsig.

The second variation on this theme operates to discredit the Lama with whom the student might make the vow. A good example of this was in a report on the first conference of Western Buddhist teachers with HH Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1993. At one of the conference sessions, Robert Thurman reportedly said that anyone who allowed himself or herself to be called a vajra master should be presented with a plate of excrement and a fork. If he or she was not capable of eating it, based on the principle of rochig (*ro gcig* - one taste), then he or she was a fraud and should take up knitting. This politically devious perspective is one which seeks to neuter every Lama who is not invested with the correct degree of current western adulation. Evidently a Lama who denies being a vajra master but who is nonetheless regarded as a vajra master is exempt from the offer of Robert Thurman's fæcal feast.

From: The "Feast on Fæces Fallacy" Or - how not to scare oneself away from liberation  
- by Nora Cameron in: <http://www.damtsig.org/articles/faeces.html>

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### Necrophilia

In a brilliant essay on Tantrism, the Mexican essayist and poet Octavio Paz drew attention to the fact that the great fondness of the Mexicans for skeletons and skulls could be found nowhere else in the world except in the Buddhist ritual practices of the Tibetans and Nepalese. The difference lies in the fact that in Mexico the death figures are regarded as a mockery of life and the living, whilst in Tantrism they are "horrific and obscene" (Paz, 1984, p. 94). This connection between death and sexuality is indeed a popular *leitmotiv* in Tibetan art. In scroll images the tantric couples are appropriately equipped with skull bowls and cleavers, wear necklaces of severed heads and trample around upon corpses whilst holding one another in the embrace of sexual union.



A general, indeed dominant necrophiliac strain in Tibetan culture cannot be overlooked. Fokke Sierksma's work includes a description of a meditation cell in which a lama had been immured. It was decorated with human hair, skin and bones, which were probably supplied by the dismemberers of corpses. Strung on a line were a number of dried female breasts. The eating bowl of the immured monk was not the usual human skull, but was also made from the cured skin of a woman's breast (Sierksma, 1966, p. 189).

Such macabre ambiances can be dismissed as marginal excesses, which is indeed what they are in the full sweep of Tibetan culture. But they nonetheless stand in a deep meaningful and symbolic connection with the paradoxical philosophy of Tantrism, of Buddhism in general even, which since its beginnings recommended as exercises meditation upon corpses in the various stages of decomposition in order to recognize the transience of all being. Alone the early Buddhist contempt for life, which locked the gateway to *nirvana*, is sufficient to understand the regular fascination with the morbid, the macabre and the decay of the body which characterizes Lamaism. Crematoria, charnel fields, cemeteries, funeral pyres, graves, but also places where a murder was carried out or a bloody battle was fought are considered, in accord with the "law of inversion", to be especially suitable locations for the performance of the tantric rites with a wisdom consort.

The sacred art of Tibet also revels in macabre subjects. In illustrations of the wrathful deities of the Tibetan pantheon, their hellish radiation is transferred to the landscape and the heavens and transform everything into a *nature morte* in the truest sense of the word. Black whirlwinds and greenish poisonous vapors sweep across infertile plains. Deep red rods of lightning flash through the night and rent clouds, ridden by witches, rage across a pitch black sky. Pieces of corpses are scattered everywhere, and are gnawed at by all manner of repulsive beasts of prey.

In order to explain the morbidity of Tibetan monastic culture, the Dutch cultural psychologist Fokke Sierksma makes reference to Sigmund Freud's concept of a "death wish" (*thanatos*). Interestingly, a comparison to Buddhism occurs to the famous psychoanalyst when describing the structure of the necrophiliac urge, which he attributes to, among other things, the "nirvana principle". This he understands to be a general desire for inactivity, rest, resolution, and death, which is claimed to be innate to all life. But in addition to this, since Freud, the death wish also exhibits a concrete sadistic and masochistic component. Both attitudes are expressions of aggression, the one directed outwards (sadism), the other directed inwardly (masochism).

### Ritual murder

The most aggressive form of the externalized death wish is murder. It remains as the final taboo violation within the tantric scheme to still be examined. The ritual killing of people to appease the gods is a sacred deed in many religions. In no sense do such ritual sacrifices belong to the past, rather they still play a role today, for example in the tantric *Kali* cults of India. Even children are

offered up to the cruel goddess on her bloody altars (*Time*, August 1997, p. 18). Among the Buddhist, in particular Tibetan, Tantrics such acts of violence are not so well-known. We must therefore very carefully pose the question of whether a ritual murder can here too be a part of the cult activity.

It is certain at least that all the texts of the Highest Tantra class verbally call for murder. The adept who seeks refuge in the Dhyani Buddha *Akshobya* meditates upon the various forms of hate up to and including aggressive killing. Of course, in this case too, a taboo violation is to be transformed in accordance with the “law of inversion” into its opposite, the attainment of eternal life. Thus, when the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* requires of the adept that “he should kill all sentient beings with this secret thunderbolt” (Wayman, 1977, p. 309), then — according to doctrine — this should occur so as to free them from suffering.

It is further seen as an honorable deed to “deliver” the world from people of whom a yogi knows that they will in future commit nasty crimes. Thus Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, in his childhood killed a boy whose future abominable deeds he foresaw.



***Maha Siddha Virupa and an impaled human***

But it is not just pure compassion or a transformatory intent which lies behind the already mentioned calls to murder in the tantras, above all not then when they are directed at the enemies of Buddhism. As, for example, in the rites of the *Hevajra Tantra*: “After having announced the intention to the guru and accomplished beings”, it says there, “perform with mercy the rite of killing of one who is a non-believer of the teachings of the Buddha and the detractors of the gurus and Buddhas. One should emanate such a person, visualizing his form as being upside-down, vomiting blood, trembling and with hair in disarray. Imagine a blazing needle entering his back. Then by envisioning the seed-syllable of the Fire element in his heart he is killed instantly” (quoted by Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 276). The *Guhyasamaja Tantra* also offers instructions on how to — as in voodoo magic — create images of the opponent and inflict “murderous” injuries upon these, which then actually occur in reality: “One draws a man or a woman in chalk or charcoal or similar. One projects an ax in the hand. Then one projects the way in which the throat is slit” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 225). At another point the enemy is bewitched, poisoned, enslaved, or paralyzed. Corresponding sentences are to be found in the *Kalachakra Tantra*. There too the adept is urged to murder a being which has violated the Buddhist teachings. The text requires, however, that this be carried out with compassion (Dalai Lama XIV, 1985, p. 349).

The destruction of opponents via magical means is part of the basic training of any tantric adept. For example, we learn from the *Hevajra Tantra* a magic spell with the help of which all the soldiers of an enemy army can be decapitated at one stroke (Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 30). There we can also find how to produce a blazing fever in the enemy's body and let it be vaporized (Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 31). Such magical killing practices were — as we shall show — in no sense marginal to Tibetan religious history, rather they gained entry to the broad-scale politics of the Dalai Lamas.

The destructive rage does not even shy away from titans, gods, or Buddhas. In contrast, through the destruction of the highest beings the Tantric absorbs their power and becomes an arch-god. Even here things sometimes take a sadistic turn, as for example in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, where the murder of a Buddha is demanded: “One douses him in blood, one douses him in water, one douses him in excrement and urine, one turns him over, stamps on his member, then one makes use of the King of Wrath. If this is completed eight hundred times then even a Buddha is certain to disintegrate” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 219).

In order to effectively perform this Buddha murder, the yogi invokes an entire pandemonium, whose grotesque appearance could have been modeled on a work by Hieronymus Bosch: “He projects the threat of demons, manifold, raw, horrible, hardened by rage. Through this even the diamond bearer [the Highest Buddha] dies. He projects how he is eaten by owls, crows, by rutting vultures with long beaks. Thus even the Buddha is destroyed with certainty. A black snake, extremely brutish, which makes the fearful be afraid. ... It rears up, higher than the forehead. Consumed by this snake even the Buddha is destroyed with certainty. One lets the the perils and torments of all beings in the ten directions descend upon the enemy. This is the best. This is the supreme type of invocation” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 230). This can be strengthened with the following aggressive mantra: “Om, throttle, throttle, stand, stand, bind, bind, slay, slay, burn, burn,

bellow, bellow, blast, blast the leader of all adversity, prince of the great horde, bring the life to an end" (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 230).

We encounter a particularly interesting murder fantasy in the deliberate staging of the Oedipus drama which a passage from the *Candamaharosana Tantra* requires. The adept should slay *Aksobhya*, his Buddha father, with a sword, give his mother, *Mamaki*, the flesh of the murdered father to eat and have sexual intercourse with her afterwards (George, 1974, p. 59; Filliozat, 1991, p. 430).

Within the spectrum of Buddhist/tantric killing practices, the deliberately staged "suicide" of the "sevenfold born" represents a specialty. We are dealing here with a person who has been reincarnated seven times and displays exceptional qualities of character. He speaks with a pleasant voice, observes with beautiful eyes and possesses a fine-smelling and glowing body which casts seven shadows. He never becomes angry and his mind is constantly filled with infinite compassion. Consuming the flesh of such a wonderful person has the greatest magical effects.

Hence, the Tantric should offer a "sevenfold born" veneration with flowers and ask him to act in the interests of all suffering beings. Thereupon — it says in the relevant texts — he will without hesitation surrender his own life. Afterwards pills are to be made from his flesh, the consumption of which grant among other things the *siddhis* (powers) of 'sky-walking'. Such pills are in fact still being distributed today. The heart-blood is especially sought after, and the skull of the killed blessed one also possesses magical powers (Farrow and Menon, 1992, p. 142).

When one considers the suicide request made to the "sevenfold born", the cynical structure of the tantric system becomes especially clear. His flesh is so yearned-for because he exhibits that innocence which the Tantric on account of his contamination with all the base elements of the world of appearances no longer possesses. The "sevenfold born" is the complete opposite of an adept, who has had dealings with the dark forces of the demonic. In order to transform himself through the blissful flesh of an innocent, the yogi requests such a one to deliberately sacrifice himself. And the higher being is so kind that it actually responds to this request and afterwards makes his dead body available for sacred consumption.

The mystery of the eucharist, in which the body and blood of Christ is divided among his believers springs so readily to mind that it is not impossible that the tantric consumption of a "sevenfold born" represents a Buddhist paraphrase of the Christian Last Supper. (The tantras appeared in the 4th century C.E. at the earliest.) But such self-sacrificial scenes can also be found already in *Mahayana* Buddhism. In the *Sutra of Perfected Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses* a description can be found of how the Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita dismembers his own body in order to worship his teacher. Firstly he slits both his arms so that the blood pours out. Then he slices the flesh from his legs and finally breaks his own bones so as to be able to also offer the marrow as a gift.

Whatever opinion one has of such ecstatic acts of self-dismemberment, in *Mahayana* they always demonstrate the heroic deed of an ethically superior being who wishes to help others. In contrast, the cynical sacrifice of the “sevenfold born” demonstrates the exploitation of a noble and selfless sentiment to serve the power interests of the Tantric. In the face of such base motives, the Tibet researcher David Snellgrove with some justification doubts the sevenfold incarnated’s imputed preparedness to be sacrificed: “Did one track him down and wait for him to die or did one hasten the process? All these tantras give so many fierce rites with the object of slaying, that the second alternative might not seem unlikely ...” (Snellgrove, 1987, vol. 1, p. 161).

### Symbol and reality

Taking Snellgrove's suspicion as our starting point, the question arises as to whether the ritual murder of a person is intended to be real or just symbolic in the tantric scripts. Among Western interpreters of the tantras opinions are divided. Early researchers such as Austine Waddell or Albert Grünwedel presumed a literal interpretation of the rituals described in the texts and were dismayed by them. Among contemporary authors, especially those who are themselves Buddhists, the “crimes” of *Vajrayana* are usually played down as allegorical metaphors, as Michael M. Broido or Anagarika Govinda do in their publications, for example. This toned-down point of view is, for readily understandable reasons, today thankfully adopted by Tibetan lamas teaching everywhere in the Western world. It liberates the gurus from tiresome confrontations with the ethical norms of the cultures in which they have settled after their flight from Tibet. They too now see themselves called to transform the offensive shady sides of the tantras into friendly bright sides: “Human flesh” for example is to be understood as referring to the own imperfect self which the yogi “consumes” in a figurative sense through his sacred practices. “To kill” means to rob dualistic thought patterns of their life in order to recreate the original unity with the universe, and so forth. But despite such euphemisms an unpleasant taste remains, since the statements of the tantras are so unequivocal and clear.

It is at any rate a fact that the entire tantric ritual schema does not get by without dead body parts and makes generous use of them. The sacred objects employed consist of human organs, flesh, and bones. Normally these are found at and collected from the public crematoria in India or the charnel fields of Tibet.

But there are indications which must be taken seriously that up until this century Tibetans have had to surrender their lives for ritualistic reasons. The (fourteenth-century) *Blue Annals*, a seminal document in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, already reports upon how in Tibet the so-called “18 robber-monks” slaughtered men and women for their tantric ceremonies (*Blue Annals*, 1995, p. 697). The Englishman Sir Charles Bell visited a stupa on the Bhutan-Tibet border in which the ritually killed body of an eight-year-old boy and a girl of the same age were found (Bell, 1927, p. 80). Attestations of human sacrifice in the Himalayas recorded by the American anthropologist Robert Ekvall date from the 1950s (Ekvall, 1964, pp. 165–166, 169, 172).

In their criticism of lamaism, the Chinese make frequent and emphatic reference to such ritual killing practices, which were still widespread at the time of the so-called “liberation” of the country, that is until the end of the 1950s. According to them, in the year 1948 21 individuals were murdered by state sacrificial priests from Lhasa as part of a ritual of enemy destruction, because their organs were required as magical ingredients (Grunfeld, 1996, p. 29). Rather than dismissing such statements in advance as evil communist propaganda, the original spirit of the tantra texts would seem to afford that they be investigated conscientiously and without prejudice.

The morbid ritual objects on display in the *Tibetan Revolutions Museum* established by the Chinese in Lhasa, certainly teach us something about horror: prepared skulls, mummified hands, rosaries made of human bones, ten trumpets made from the thigh bones of 16-year-old girls, and so on. Among the museum’s exhibits is also a document which bears the seal of the (Thirteenth or Fourteenth?) Dalai Lama in which he demands the contribution of human heads, blood, flesh, fat, intestines, and right hands, likewise the skins of children, the menstrual blood of a widow, and stones with which human skulls had been staved in, for the “strengthening of holy order” (Epstein, 1983, p.138). Further, a small parcel of severed and prepared male sexual organs which are needed to conduct certain rituals can also be seen there, as well as the charred body of a young woman who was burned as a witch. If the tantra texts did not themselves mention such macabre requisites, it would never occur to one to take this demonstration of religious violence seriously.

That the Chinese with their accusations of tantric excesses cannot be all that false, is demonstrated by the relatively recent brutal murder of three lamas, which deeply shook the exile-Tibetan community in Dharamsala. On 4 February 1997, the murdered bodies of the 70-year-old lama Lobsang Gyatso, head of the Buddhist-dialectical school, and two of his pupils were found just a few yards from the residence of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. The murderers had repeatedly stabbed their victims with a knife, had slit their throats and according to press reports had partially skinned their corpses (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1997, no. 158, p. 10). All the observers and commentators on the case were of the unanimous opinion that this was a case of ritual murder. In the second part of our analysis we examine in detail the real and symbolic background and political implications of the events of 4 February.

At any rate, the supreme demands which a yogi must make of himself in order to expose a “crime” which he “really” commits as an illusion speaks for the likelihood of the actual staging of a killing during a tantric ritual. In the final instance the conception that everything is only an illusion and has no independent existence leads to an indifference as to whether a murder is real or “just” allegorical. From this point of view everything in the world of *Vajrayana* is both “real” and “symbolic”. “We touch symbols, when we think we are touching bodies and material objects”, writes Octavio Paz with regard to Tantrism, “And vice versa: according to the law of reversibility all symbols are real and touchable, ideas and even nothingness has a taste. It makes no difference whether the crime is real or symbolic: Reality and symbol fuse, and in fusing they dissolve” (Paz, 1984, pp. 91–92).



## Concurrence with the demonic

The excesses of Tantrism are legitimated by the claim that the yogi is capable of transforming evil into good via his spiritual techniques. This inordinate attempt nonetheless give rise to apprehensions as to whether the adept does in fact have the strength to resist all the temptations of the “devil”? Indeed, the “law of inversion” always leads in the first phase to a “concurrence with the demonic” and regards contact with the “devil” as a proper admission test for the path of enlightenment. No other current in any of the world religions thus ranks the demons and their retinue so highly as in *Vajrayana*.

The image packed iconography of Tibet literally teems with terrible deities (*herukas*) and red henchmen. When one dares, one's gaze is met by disfigured faces, hate-filled grimaces, bloodshot eyes, protruding canines. Twisted sneers leave one trembling — at once both terrible and wonderful, as in an oriental fairy-tale. Surrounded by ravens and owls, embraced by snakes and animal skins, the male and female monster gods carry battle-axes, swords, pikes and other murderous cult symbols in their hands, ready at any moment to cut their opponent into a thousand pieces.

The so-called “books of the dead” and other ritual text are also storehouses for all manner of zombies, people-eaters, ghosts, ghouls, furies and fiends. In the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* the concurrence of the Buddhas with the demonic and evil is elevated to an explicit part of the program: “They constantly eat blood and scraps of flesh ... They drink treachery like milk ... skulls, bones, smokehouses, oil and fat bring great joy” (quoted by Gäng, 1988, pp. 259–260). In this document the Buddhist gods give free rein to their aggressive destructive fantasies: “Hack to pieces, hack to pieces, sever, sever, strike, strike, burn, burn” they urge the initiands with furious voices (quoted by Gäng, 1988, p. 220). One could almost believe oneself to be confronted with primordial chaos. Such horror visions are not just encountered by the tantric adept. They also, in Tibetan Buddhist tradition, appear to every normal person, sometimes during a lifetime on earth, but after death inevitably. Upon dying every deceased person must, unless he is already enlightened, progress through a limbo (*Bardo*) in which bands of devils sadistically torment him and attempt to pull the wool over his eyes. As in the Christian Middle Ages, the Tibetan monks' fantasies also revel in unbearable images of hell. It is said that not even a Bodhisattva is permitted to help a person out of the hell of *Vajra* (Trungpa, 1992, p. 68).

Here too we would like to come up with a lengthier description, in order to draw attention to the anachronistic-excruciating world view of Tantric Buddhism: “The souls are boiled in great cauldrons, inserted into iron caskets surrounded by flames, plunge into icy water and caves of ice, wade through rivers of fire or swamps filled with poisonous adders. Some are sawed to pieces by demonic henchmen, others plucked at with glowing tongs, gnawed by vermin, or wander lost through a forest with a foliage of razor sharp daggers and swords. The tongues of those who blasphemed against the teaching grow as big as a field and the devils plow upon them. The hypocrites are crushed beneath huge loads of holy books and towering piles of relics” (Bleichsteiner, 1937, p. 224). There are a total of 18 different hells, one more dreadful than the next. Above all, the most brutal punishments are reserved for those “sinners” who have



contravened the rules of *Vajrayana*. They can wait for their “head and heart [to] burst” (Henss, 1985, p. 46).

A glance at old Tibetan criminal law reveals that such visions of fear and horror also achieved some access to social reality. Its methods of torture and devious forms of punishment were in no way inferior to the Chinese cruelties now denounced everywhere: for example, both hands of thieves were mutilated by being locked into salt-filled leather pouches. The amputation of limbs and bloody floggings on the public squares of Lhasa, deliberately staged freezing to death, shackling, the fitting of a yoke and many other “medieval” torments were to be found in the penal code until well into the 20th century. Western travelers report with horror and loathing of the dark and damp dungeons of the Potala, the official residence of the Dalai Lamas.

This clear familiarity with the spectacle of hell in a religion which bears the banners of love and kindness, peace and compassion is shocking for an outsider. It is only the paradoxicalness of the tantras and the *Madhyamika* philosophy (the doctrine of the ‘emptiness’ of all being) which allows the rapid interplay between heaven and hell which characterizes Tibetan culture. Every lama will answer that, “since everything is pure illusion, that must also be the case for the world of demons”, should one ask him about the devilish ghosts. He will indicate that it is the ethical task of Buddhism to free people from this world of horrors. But only when one has courageously looked the demon in the eye, can he be exposed as illusory or as a ghostly figure thrown up by one’s own consciousness.

Nevertheless, that the obsessive and continuous preoccupation with the terrible is motivated by such therapeutic intentions and philosophical speculations is difficult to comprehend. The demonic is accorded a disturbingly high intrinsic value in Tibetan culture, which influences all social spheres and possesses a seamless tradition. When Padmasambhava converted Tibet to Buddhism in the eighth century, the sagas recount that he was opposed by numerous native male and female devils, against all of whom he was victorious thanks to his skills in magic. But despite his victory he never killed them, and instead forced them to swear to serve Buddhism as protective spirits (*dharmapalas*) in future.

Why, we have to ask ourselves, was this horde of demons snorting with rage not transformed via the tantric “law of inversion” into a collection of peace-loving and graceful beings? Would it not have been sensible for them to have abandoned their aggressive character in order to lead a peaceful and dispassionate life in the manner of the Buddha Shakyamuni? The opposite was the case — the newly “acquired” Buddhist protective gods (*dharmapalas*) had not just the chance but also the duty to live out their innate aggressiveness to the full. This was even multiplied, but was no longer directed at orthodox Buddhists and instead acted to crush the “enemies of the teaching”. The atavistic pandemonium of the pre-Buddhist Land of Snows survived as a powerful faction within the tantric pantheon and, since horror in general exercises a greater power of fascination than a “boring” vision of peace, deeply determined Tibetan cultural life.

Many Tibetans — among them, as we shall later see, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama — still believe themselves to be constantly threatened by demonic powers, and are kept busy holding back the dark forces with the help of magic, supplicatory prayers, and liturgical techniques, but also recruiting them for their own ends, all of which incidentally provides a considerable source of income for the professional exorcists among the lamas. Directly alongside this underworldly abyss — at least in the imagination — a mystic citadel of pure peace and eternal rest rises up, of which there is much talk in the sacred writings. Both visions — that of horror and that of bliss — complement one another and are in Tantrism linked in a “theological” causal relationship which says that heaven may only be entered after one has journeyed through hell.

In his psychoanalytical study of Tibetan culture, Fokke Sierksma conjectures that the chronic fear of demonic attacks was spread by the lamas to help maintain their power and, further to this, is blended with a sadomasochistic delight in the macabre and aggressive. The enjoyment of cruelty widespread among the monks is legitimated by, among other things, the fact that — as can be read in the tantra texts — even the Highest Buddhas can assume the forms of cruel gods (*herukas*) to then, bellowing and full of hate, smash everything to pieces.

These days a smile is raised by the observations of the Briton Austine Waddells, who, in his famous book published in 1899, *The Buddhism in Tibet*, drew attention to the general fear which then dominated every aspect of religious life in Tibet: “The priests must be constantly called in to appease the menacing devils, whose ravenous appetite is only sharpened by the food given to stay it” (quoted by Sierksma, 1966, p. 164). However, Waddell’s images of horror were confirmed a number of decades later by the Tibetologist Guiseppe Tucci, whose scholarly credibility cannot be doubted: “The entire spiritual life of the Tibetans”, Tucci writes, “is defined by a permanent attitude of defense, by a constant effort to appease and propitiate the powers whom he fears” (Grunfeld, 1996, p. 26).

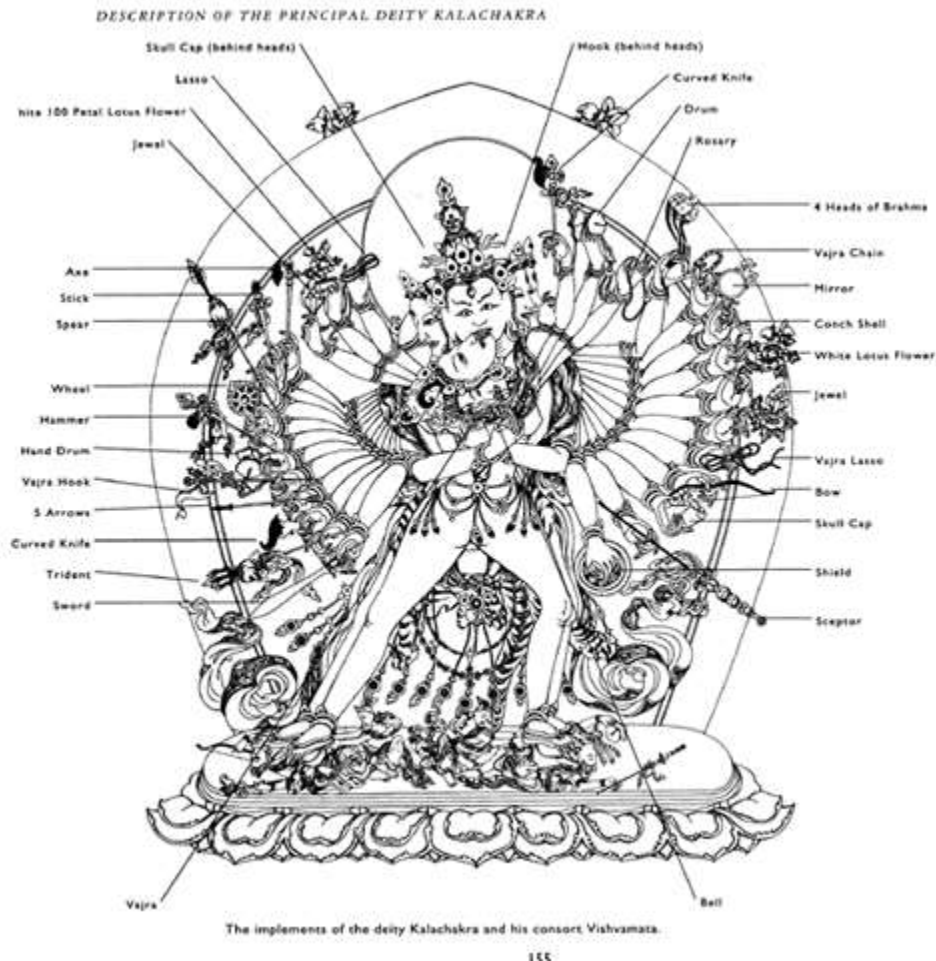
There is no need for us to rely solely on Western interpreters in order to demonstrate Tantrism’s demonic orientation; rather we can form an impression for ourselves. Even a fleeting examination of the violent tantric iconography confirms that horror is a determining element of the doctrine. Why do the “divine” demons on the thangkas only very seldom take to the field against one another but rather almost exclusively mow down men, women, and children? What motivates the “peace-loving” Dalai Lama to choose as his principal protective goddess a maniacal woman by the name of *Palden Lhamo*, who rides day and night through a boiling sea of blood? The fearsome goddess is seated upon a saddle which she herself personally crafted from the skin of her own son. She murdered him in cold blood because he refused to follow in the footsteps of his converted mother and become a Buddhist. Why — we must also ask ourselves — has the militant war god *Begtse* been so highly revered for centuries in the Tibetan monasteries of all sects?

One might believe that this “familiarity with the demonic” would by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have changed among the exile Tibetans, who are praised for their “open-mindedness”. Unfortunately, many events of which we come to speak of in the second part of our study, but most especially the recent and already mentioned ritual murders of 4 February 1997 in Dharamsala, illustrate that the gates of hell are by no means bolted shut. According to reports so far, the perpetrators were acting on behalf of the aggressive protective spirit, *Dorje Shugden*. Even the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has attributed to this *dharmapala* (protective deity) the power to threaten his life and to bewitch him by magical means.

If horror is acceptable, then death is cheap. It is true that in Tantrism death is considered to be a state of consciousness which can be surmounted, but in Tibetan culture (which also incorporates non-tantric elements) like the demons it has also achieved a thriving “life of its own” and enjoys general cult worship. There — as we shall often come to show — it stands at the center of numerous macabre rites. Sigmund Freud’s problematic formulation, that “the goal of all life is death” can in our view be prefaced to Lamaism as its *leitmotiv*.

### **The aggression of the divine couple**

Does this iconography of horror also apply to the divine couple who are worshipped at the heart of the tantric rituals? On the basis of the already described apotheosis of mystic sexual love as the suspension of all opposites, as a creative polarity, as the origin of language, the gods, time, of compassion, emptiness, and of the white light we ought to assume that the primal couple radiate peace, harmony, concord, and joy. In fact there are such blissful illustrations of the love of god and goddess in Tantrism. In this connection the primal Buddha, *Samantabhadra*, highly revered in the Nyingmapa school, deserves special mention; naked he sits in the meditative posture without any ritual objects in his hands, embracing his similarly unclothed partner, *Samantabhadri*. This pure nakedness of the loving couple demonstrates a powerful vision, which breaks through the otherwise usual patriarchal relation of dominance which prevails between the sexes. All other images of the Buddhas with their consorts express an androcentric gesture of dominance through the symbolic objects assigned to them. [1]



### ***The implements of the deity Kalachakra and his consort Vishvamata***

Peaceful images of the divine couple are, however, exceptional within the Highest Tantras and in no way the rule. The majority of the *yab-yum* representations are of the *Heruka* type, that is, they show couples in furious, destructive and violent positions. Above all the Buddha *Hevajra* and his consort *Nairatmya*. Surrounded by eight “burning” dakinis he performs a bizarre dance of hell and is so intoxicated by his killing instinct that he holds a skull bowl in each of his sixteen hands, in which gods, humans, and animals are to be found as victims. In her right hand *Nairatmya* threateningly swings a cleaver. *Raktiamari*, *Yamantaka*, *Cakrasamvara*, *Vajrakila* or whatever names the clusters of pairs from the other tantras may have, all of them exhibit the same striking mixture of aggressiveness, thanatos, and erotic love.

Likewise, the time god, *Kalachakra*, is of the heruka type. His wildness is underlined by his vampire-like canines and his hair which stands on end. The tiger pelt draped around his hips also signalizes his aggressive character. Two of his four faces are not peaceful, but instead express greed and wrath. But above all his destructive attitude is emphasized by the symbols which the “Lord of Time” holds in his twenty-four hands. Of these, six are of a peaceful nature and eighteen

are warlike. Among the latter are the *vajra*, *vajra* hook, sword, trident, cleaver, *damaru* (a drum made from two skull bowls), *kapala* (a vessel made out of a human skull), *khatvanga* (a type of scepter, the tip of which is decorated with three severed human heads), ax, discus, switch, shield, *ankusha* (elephant hook), arrow, bow, sling, prayer beads made from human bones as well as the severed heads of *Brahma*. The peaceable symbols are: a jewel, lotus, white conch shell, *triratna* (triple jewel), and fire, so long it is not used destructively. Finally, there is the bell.

His consort, *Vishvamata*, also fails to make a pacifist impression. Of the eight symbolic objects which she holds in her eight hands, six are aggressive or morbid, and only two, the lotus and the triple jewel, signify happiness and well-being. Among her magical defense weapons are the cleaver, *vajra* hook, a drum made from human skulls, skull bowls filled with hot blood, and prayer beads made out of human bones. To signalize that she is under the control of the androcentric principle, each of her four heads bears a crown consisting of a small figure who represents the male Dhyani Buddha, *Vajrasattva*. As far as the facial expressions of the time goddess can be deciphered, above all they express sexual greed.

Both principal deities, *Kalachakra* and *Vishvamata*, stand joined in union in the so-called at-ease stance, which is supposed to indicate their preparedness for battle and willingness to attack. The foundation is composed of four cushions. Two of these symbolize the sun and moon, the other two the imaginary planets, *Rahu* and *Kalagni*. *Rahu* is believed to swallow both of the former heavenly bodies and plays a role within the *Kalachakra* rituals which is just as prominent as that of *Kalagni*, the apocalyptic fire which destroys the world with flame. The two planets thus have an extremely aggressive and destructive nature. Beneath the feet of the time couple two Hindu gods are typically shown being trampled, the red love god *Kama* and the white terror god *Rudra*. Their two partners, *Rati* and *Uma*, try in vain to rescue them.

Consequently, the entire scenario of the *Kalachakra Tantra* is warlike, provocative, morbid, and hot-tempered. In examining its iconography, one constantly has the feeling of being witness to a massacre. It is no help against this when the many commentaries stress again and again that aggressive ritual objects, combative body postures, expressions of rage, and wrathful deeds are necessary in order to surmount obstacles which block the individual's path to enlightenment. Nor, in light of the pathological compulsiveness with which the Tantric attempts to drive out horror with horror, is the affirmation convincing, that Buddha's wrath is compensated for by Buddha's love and that all this cruelty is for the benefit of all suffering beings.

The aggressiveness of both partners in the tantras remains a puzzle. To our knowledge it is not openly discussed anywhere, but rather accepted mutely. In the Highest Tantras we can all but assume the principle that the loving couple as the wrathful- warlike and turbulent element finds its counterpoint in a peaceful and unmoving Buddha in meditative posture. In the light of this tantric iconography one has the impression that the *vajra* master prefers a hot and aggressive sexuality with which to effect the transformation of erotic love into power. Perhaps the Dutch psychologist, Fokke Sierksma, did not lie so wide of the mark when he described the tantric

performance as “sadomasochistic”, whereby the sadistic role is primarily played by the man, whilst the woman exhibits both compulsions together. At any rate, the energy set free by “hot sex” appears to be an especially sought-after substance for the yogis’ “alchemic” transformative games, which we will come to examine in more detail later in the course of our study.

The poetry and beauty of mystic sexual love is far more often (even if not at all consistently) expressed in the words of the Highest Tantra texts, than in the visual representations of a morbid tantric eroticism. This does not fit together somehow. Since at the end of the sexual magic rituals the masculine principle alone remains, the verbal praise of the goddess, beauty and love could also be manipulative, designed to conjure up the devotion of a woman. Bearing in mind that the method (*upaya*) of the yogis can also be translated as “trick”, we may not exclude such a possibility.

### Western criticism

In the light of the unconcealed potential for violence and manifest obsessions with power within Tantric Buddhism it is incomprehensible that the idea has spread, even among many Western authors and a huge public too, that *Vajrayana* is a religious practice which exclusively promotes peace. This seems all the more misled since the whole system in no way denies its own destructiveness and draws its entire power from the exploitation of extremes. In the face of such inconsistencies, some keen interpreters of the tantras project the violent Buddhist fantasies outwards, by making Hinduism and the West responsible for aggression and hunger for power.

For example, the Tibetologist of German origins, Herbert Guenther (born 1917), who has been engaged in an attempt to win philosophical respectability for *Vajrayana* in Europe and America since the 60s, sharply attacks the Western and Hindu cultures: “this purely Hinduistic power mentality, so similar to the Western dominance psychology, was generalized and applied to all forms of Tantrism by writers who did not see or, due to their being steeped so much in dominance psychology, could not understand that the desire to realize Being is not the same as the craving for power” (Guenther, 1976, p. 64). The sacred eroticism of Buddhism is completely misunderstood in the west and interpreted as sexual pleasure and exploitation. “The use of sexuality as a tool of power destroys its function”, this author tells us and continues, “Buddhist Tantrism dispenses with the idea of power, in which it sees a remnant of subjectivistic philosophy, and even goes beyond mere pleasure to the enjoyment of being and of enlightenment unattainable without woman” (Guenther, 1976, 66).

Anagarika Govinda (1898-1985), also a German converted to Buddhism whose original name was Ernst Lothar Hoffmann and who believed himself to be a reincarnation of the German romantic Novalis, made even greater efforts to deny a claim to power in Tibetan Buddhism. He even attempted, with — when one considers the print run of his books — obviously great success, to cleanse *Vajrayana* of its sacred sexuality and present it as a pure, spiritual school of wisdom.

Govinda also gives the Hindus the blame for everything bad about the tantras. *Shakti* — the German lama says — mean power. “United with *Shakti*, be full of power!”, it says in a Hindu tantra (Govinda, 1984, p. 106). “The concept of *Shakti*, of divine power,” — the author continues — “plays absolutely no role in Buddhism. Whilst in tantric Hinduism the concept of power lies at the center of concern” (Govinda, 1984, p. 105). Further, we are told, the Tibetan yogi is free of all sexual and power fantasies. He attains union exclusively with the “eternal feminine”, the symbol for “emotion, love, heart, and compassion”. “In this state there is no longer anything ‘sexual’ in the time-honored sense of the word ...” (Govinda, 1984, p. 111).

Yet the feminist critique of *Vajrayana*, which Miranda Shaw presented in her book on “Women in Tantric Buddhism” published in 1994, appears even more odd. With reference to Herbert Guenther she also judges the interpretation of authors who reveal Tantrism to be a sexual and spiritual exploitation of the woman, to be a maneuver of “western dominance psychology”. These “androcentric” scholars reiterate a prejudice embedded deeply within western culture, which says that men are always active, women in contrast passive victims; men are power conscious, women are powerless; men are molded by intellect, women by emotion. It was suggested that women did not possess the capacity to practice tantric Yoga (Shaw, 1994, p. 9).

It is no surprise that the “militant Tantric” Miranda Shaw argues thus, then from the first to the last line of her committed book she tries to bring the proof that women were in no way inferior to the great gurus and *Maha Siddhas*. The apparently meager number of “yoginis” to be found in the history of *Vajrayana*, compared that is to the literally countless assembly of tantric masters, are built up by the author into a spiritual, female super-elite. The women from the founding phase of Tantrism — we learn here — did not just work together with their male partners as equals, rather they were far superior to them in their knowledge of mysteries. They are the actual “masters” and Tantric Buddhism owes its very existence to them. This radical feminist attempt to interpret Tantrism as an originally matriarchal cult event, is however, not entirely unjustified. Let us briefly trace its footsteps.

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#### Footnotes:

[1] In the usual *yab–yum* representation of the Dhyani Buddhas, the male Buddha figure always crosses both of his arms behind the back of his wisdom consort, forming what is known as the *Vajrahumkara* gesture. At the same time he holds a *vajra* (the supreme symbol of masculinity) in his right hand, and a *gantha* (the supreme symbol of femininity) in his left. The symbolic possession of both ritual objects identifies him as the lord of both sexes. He is the androgyne and the *prajna* is a part of his self.